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Teens Who Choose Music Over Books Are More Likely to Be Depressed, Study Finds

ScienceDaily (Apr. 4, 2011) — Adolescents who spend more time listening to music are far more likely to have major depressive disorder, while young people who spend more time reading books are far less likely to have such a diagnosis, according to a University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine study published in the April edition of the journal *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*.

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The findings add to the growing body of research linking emotional health to media exposure. The study was unique in that it was one of the first to measure media exposure using an intensive "real-life" methodology called ecological momentary assessment, in which the behaviors of study participants are repeatedly sampled in real time. The method is more reliable than standard surveys and helped researchers recognize this large association between exposure to music and depression, said Brian Primack, M.D., Ed.M., M.S., assistant professor of medicine and pediatrics at Pitt's School of Medicine, who led the study.

The study involved 106 adolescent participants, 46 of whom were diagnosed with major depressive disorder. Researchers called the participants as many as 60 times during five extended weekends over two months and asked them to report if they were using any of six types of media: television or movies, music, video games, Internet, magazines or newspapers, and books.

The researchers found that young people who were exposed to the most music, compared to those who listened to music the least, were 8.3 times more likely to be depressed. However, compared to those with the least time exposed to books, those who read books the most were one-tenth as likely to be depressed. The other media exposures were not significantly associated with depression.

"At this point, it is not clear whether depressed people begin to listen to more music to escape, or whether listening to large amounts of music can lead to depression, or both. Either way, these findings may help clinicians and parents recognize links between media and depression," Dr. Primack said. "It also is important that reading was associated with less likelihood of depression. This is worth emphasizing because overall in the U.S., reading books is decreasing, while nearly all other forms of media use are increasing."

Major depressive disorder, also referred to as clinical or major depression, is the leading cause of disability in the world. Its onset is common in adolescents and is thought to affect one in 12 teenagers, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

Other study authors include Jennifer S. Silk, Ph.D., Christian R. DeLozier, B.S., and Galen E. Switzer, Ph.D., all of the Pitt School of Medicine; William G. Shadel, Ph.D., RAND-University of Pittsburgh Health Institute; Francesca R. Dillman Carpentier, Ph.D., University of North Carolina; and Ronald E. Dahl, M.D., University of California, Berkeley.

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The study was supported by funding from the National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Mental Health and by the RAND-University of Pittsburgh Health Institute.

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Journal Reference:

- 1. B. A. Primack, J. S. Silk, C. R. DeLozier, W. G. Shadel, F. R. Dillman Carpentier, R. E. Dahl, G. E. Switzer. Using Ecological Momentary Assessment to Determine Media Use by Individuals With and Without Major Depressive Disorder. Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, 2011; 165 (4): 360 DOI: 10.1001/archpediatrics.2011.27

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● APA University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences (2011, April 4). Teens who choose music over books are more likely to be depressed, study finds. ScienceDaily. Retrieved April 5, 2011, from http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/04/110404161817.htm
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